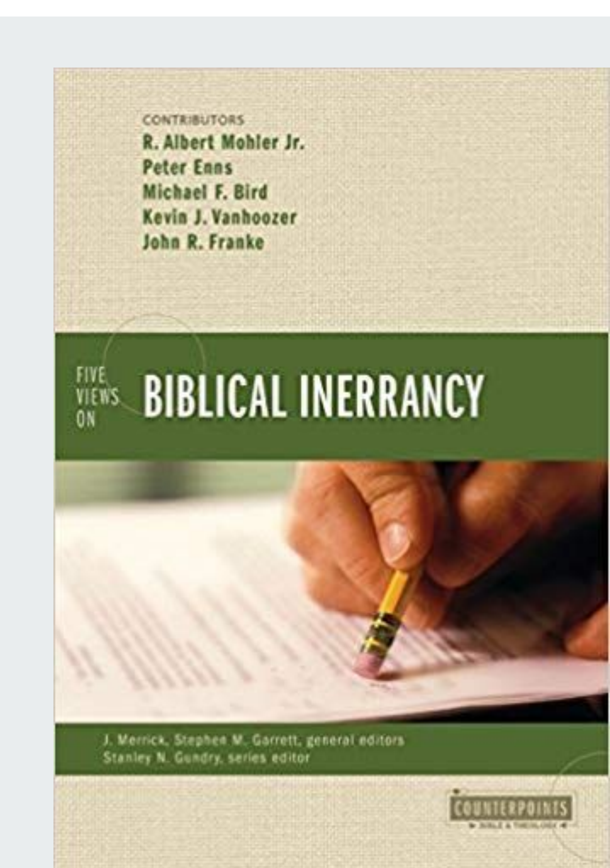
Does the Bible Contain Mistakes?

Framing how we think about biblical inerrancy





	General Theism	Christian Specific
Positive (i.e. making the case)	Reasons why God exists	Reasons why Christianity is true
Defensive (i.e. responding to objections)	Responses to arguments for atheism	Responses to arguments against Christianity

	General Theism	Christian Specific
Positive (i.e. making the case)	• Arguments for God's Existence • Cosmological • Teleological • Moral Argument • Ontological Argument	• New Testament Textual Transmission • Historical Argument for the Resurrection • Reliability of the Bible • Uniqueness of Jesus • Undesigned Coincidences
Defensive (i.e. responding to objections)	• Problem of Evil • Divine Hiddenness • Incoherence of theism	• Science vs Faith (e.g. Evolution) • **Historical Errors in the Bible** • **Scientific Errors in the Bible** • **Contradictions in the Bible** • Moral Objections to Biblical Stories • Religious Pluralism vs Particularism

My Qualifications



(A) Definition of Biblical Inerrancy

“Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact.”

- Wayne Grudem

Reference: Grudem, Wayne A. (1994). Systematic theology: an introduction to biblical doctrine. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press. p. 90.

Background - CSBI

"We are persuaded that to deny [biblical inerrancy] is to set aside the witness of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit and to refuse that submission to the claims of God's own Word which marks true Christian faith."

- Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, Preface, 1978



Reference: https://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1.pdf

Background - CSBI

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer, and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.

4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.

5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

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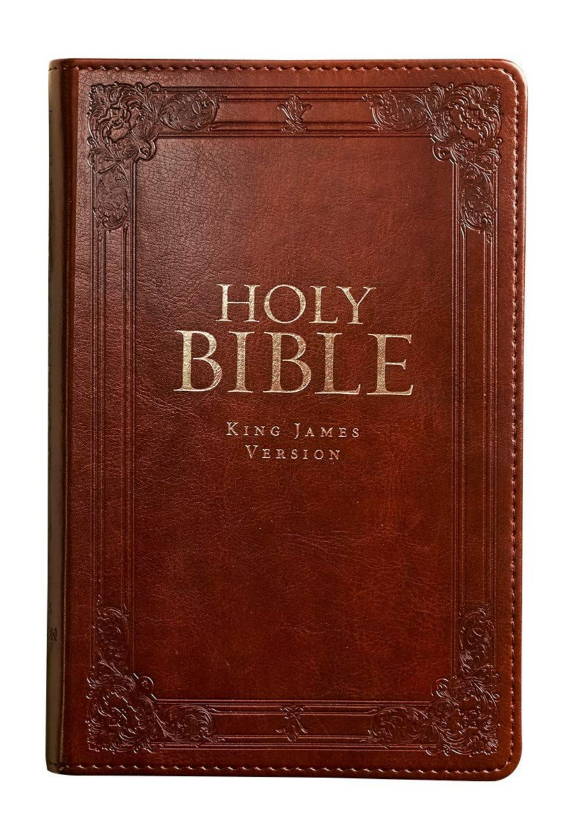
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Background

Intertwined with questions of

- God’s character
- Inspiration
- Hermeneutics (interpretation)
- Authorship/textual criticism
- Biblical authority



What Inerrancy is NOT

“We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.”

- Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, Article of Affirmation and Denial, 1978

Roadmap

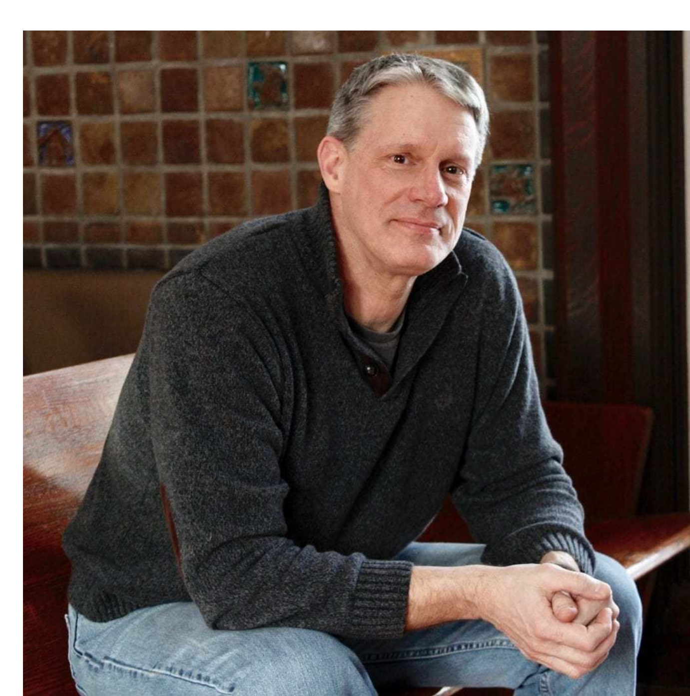
Rejects Inerrancy	Accomodation Inerrancy	“Augustinian” Inerrancy
Peter Enns: “Inerrancy, however defined, does not describe what the Bible does.”	John R. Franke and his plurality definition of truth	Kevin J. Vanhoozer’s definition of inerrancy

Peter Enns

Inerrancy places on the Bible "expectations it is not designed to bear" and assumes "that God shares our modern interest in accuracy and scientific precision." (84)

Claims that CSBI makes "literalism the default hermeneutic" (88)

"The logic seems to be that if the teaching of Scripture on creation, history, and authorship is wrong, then we have no reason to trust what Scripture says about salvation." (89) - slippery slope



Enns Application - Joshua 6



- Most archeologists believe the dating of Jericho is at odds with the biblical account
- In fact, the whole conquest of Canaan in general is not promising given the archeological record
- “The biblical story of the fall of Jericho is perhaps a significant elaboration on a historical kernel, not a reliable record of a historical event” (96).

Enns Application - Deut. 20:16-17 vs. Matt. 5:43-48

Enns thinks that to be coherent, inerrancy has to assert that the extermination of the Canaanites displays God's just moral judgment, is not in any true conflict with Jesus' teachings, and describes historical events with essential accuracy.

"Though possibly (even likely) rooted in the memory of ancient conflict, the biblical conquest narratives do not "report events" with inerrantist expectations of historical accuracy" (108).

"God is willing to meet his people where they are and allow them to tell the story in ways that reflect deeply their own cultural context" (109).



Enns Application - Deut. 20:16-17 vs. Matt. 5:43-48

Thinks Jesus' command "go therefore" is a reversal of Moses' instruction in Deut. 31:1-8

"Jesus' call to love and pray for one's enemies cannot be lined up neatly with the Old Testament and judged to a simple extension or revealing of what the Old Testament really says" (112).

"The portrayals of God reflect cultural and historical moments of the biblical writers, which therefore lead to variant expressions of God" (112).



So What?

- Inerrancy is just a way to say who’s in and who’s out of evangelicalism
- Inerrancy is a priori and prescriptive (should be a conclusion you come to given the text)
- “When protecting doctrine requires that we dismiss, mishandle, or vilify compelling information unfriendly to our doctrine, we are demonstrating not faithfulness to God’s Word but a failure to trust God more than our theology” (114).

Alternate description: with the Bible “no matter what is encountered, the reader is in the presence of the wisdom and mystery of our God” (114).

John Franke

Inerrancy definition: “The use that God makes of the creaturely medium of human speech and language in the inspiration and witness of Scripture does not entail its divination. Language, like the human nature of Jesus, remains subject to the historical, social, and cultural limitations and contingencies inherent in its creaturely character, without compromising its suitability as a medium for the Word of God” (268).

Jesus > Scripture

Creator > Creation

“Scripture is truth written (small t), in that it provides a series of faithful witnesses to the Truth of God’s self-revelation without itself becoming a manifestation of capital-t Truth.”



Franke

What inerrancy is not: “Inerrancy should not be used to suggest that the words of Scripture transcend their situatedness as a form of decontextualized, absolutist theological language…. It applies to Scripture only in the context of the original settings in which the texts that we have were constructed, and its affirmations and teachings cannot be abstracted from those contexts and offered as absolute truth, because only God knows and is Truth” (269).

Inerrancy does not mean the Bible loses its diverse settings and perspectives - “truth is characterized by plurality” (275), the Bible is “a web of interconnected beliefs” (282)

“Not every detail of the Bible is pregnant with meaning because it is a form of the Word of God” (284).

Franke Application - Joshua 6



- Doesn’t think it matters whether or not Jericho ends up being true
- Scripture’s “ultimate purpose is not to provide precise, literal details of history but to form a covenantal community called to be a blessing to the world in keeping with the mission of God” (282).

Franke Application - Deut. 20:16-17 vs. Matt. 5:43-48

- God’s commands to groups are not the same as to individuals
- “The Old Testament is a contextual accommodation to the militaristic culture of the ancient Near East” (286).
- Problem with tying all of the Bible to timeless truth is that it can be used to justify these kinds of activities today.
- Says Jesus’ teaching is deconstructive and “revises and overturns the instruction in Deuteronomy” (287).



So What?



“For who even of slight intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in measure to ‘lisp’ in speaking to us? Thus such forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as accomodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity. To do this he must descend far beneath his loftiness” (Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 1, Chapter 13, Section 1).

- We should not limit God to what we understand
- Inerrancy (or lack of) should not be able to call into question the authority of the Word of God
- Interpretations, theories, and theologies are always situated in particular social contexts - don’t assume that your assumptions are universal

Vanhoozer

Inerrancy Definition: "To say that Scripture is inerrant is to confess faith that the authors speak the truth in all things they affirm (when they make affirmations), and will eventually be seen to have spoken truly (when right readers read rightly)." (pg 207)



- Not everything in the bible is an affirmation
- Sometimes the affirmations are at the paragraph or chapter level
  - "Individual words are neither true nor false, for they do not assert anything." (218)
- Genre must be taken into consideration



UCO
CUP
EIC
RDMC
CHAN
ARCA
SCTS
ADMN
East Quad
55
NEEL
HOBB
Asbury St
Hogg St
11
4
Ireland St
Ross St
CHEM
23
ANTH
LAAH
OMB
30a
SBSA
THOM
FRAN
GLAS
AIEN
15
CSA
WALT
HLBL
MILN
HEAT
HECC
EVANS
PAV
CSC
GOLF
32
EDCT
CUSH
CCG
ANNEX
HLB
Lubbock St
Bizzell St
LECH
LEGE
BLTN
35
HAAS
MCFA
ACAD
BSBE
SCC
EABA
BEUT
BSBW
6
EABB
30c
CHPL
STCH
EABC
COMM
MOSH
YMCA
HELD
Mosher Ln
Jones St
20
NGLE
DUNN
RUDD
HEND
BTLR
PSYC
WELL
22
19
ASTO
EPPR
CLEM
ILSB
Old Main Dr
MILS
APPE
SSB
21
BRIG
UNDE
ASH2
30d
SUP3
PLNK
30e
Simpson
Drill Field
RDER
Corps Quad



Vanhoozer

“Inerrancy tells you what is said is true, but it cannot tell you what is said.” (pg 211)

“We must make every effort to avoid identifying God with *our* ideas of a Perfect Being, and inerrancy with *our* ideas of what a Perfect Book must be.” (pg 205)

He affirms that the bible is:

- Authoritative
- True
- Trustworthy
- Unified
- Coherent
- Without contradictions

when it is making an assertion.

Vanhoozer

- Language is relational
- Correspondence is covenential
- Context matters
- Genre matters



Vanhoozer Application - Joshua 6



- Most archeologists believe the dating of Jericho is at odds with the biblical account

- "Jericho is historical testimony, presented in an artful narrative way (that is, as a story-shaped history) and intended to highlight certain theological themes, all for the purpose of shaping the identity of the believing community and of encouraging them to walk faithfully before God." (226)

Vanhoozer Application - Deut. 20:16-17 vs. Matt. 5:43-48

- The Old Testament affirms the love and mercy of God (Exodus 34:6-7)
- The New Testament affirms the wrath and judgment of God
- Jesus never distances himself from the Old Testament depiction of God
- Should see passage in redemptive-historical framework that keeps the story of salvation in view the whole time
- Herem - totally devotion to God, consecrating the whole land as a temple to God (Context - same threat made to Israel, not a model for us to follow)



So What?

“To know the truth, in the deep biblical and covenantal sense, is not merely to comprehend intellectually that to which the language corresponds but to respond in such a way that our lives correspond or conform to the truth.”

-Kevin Vanhoozer

Discussion Questions

So which view best describes the Bible?

What would you change in any of these definitions?

Is the concept of inerrancy necessary or useful?

How can we convince non-believers of the trustworthiness of the Bible?

Wrap-up

Regardless of someone's view on inerrancy, chances are, they hold the Word of God in high esteem if they are a Christian - don't be mean.

Let your view on inerrancy come from a careful study of the text; don't use it as a means of limiting your interpretation.

Context is key!

